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ENERGY FOR NNSA

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SUBJECT: ROMANIA: DOE PROGRAMS RETURNING SPENT NUCLEAR FUEL

Sensitive but Unclassified; not for Internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), together with the DOE National Laboratories, have been active in Romania as part of the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI). Currently, NNSA employees and contractors are in Romania assisting with a spent fuel return shipment of U.S.-origin highly enriched uranium (HEU), which was in use at a research reactor near Pitesti. Preparations are also underway to ship Russian-origin HEU stored at the decommissioned research reactor in Magurele back to Russia. Romanian authorities have been strong, continuing supporters of GTRI in particular, as well as for other USG efforts to control securely radioactive materials, such as the Second Line of Defense Initiative. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) EconOff visited Romania's Nuclear Research Institute in Mioveni, Pitesti, on July 17 to review preparations for the shipment of U.S.-origin spent HEU fuel back to the U.S. by the end of July. NNSA and National Laboratory employees, together with several U.S. contractors, are currently at the Institute working with the Romanians to package and ship the fuel. All parties describe the cooperation between the U.S. and Romanian staffs on this effort as outstanding. The Director of the Institute, Constantin Paunoiu; the senior Deputy Director in charge of nuclear safety, Dr. Marin Ciocanescu; and the Acting President of the Romanian Nuclear Regulatory Agency (CNCAN), Lucian Biro (PhD) all affirmed the GOR's strong support for this project.

¶3. (SBU) The Institute houses two reactors: a 14-megawatt TRIGA reactor, and a "pulse" reactor, both used for the fabrication and testing of nuclear materials. The reactors have already been converted to utilize low enriched uranium (LEU) fuel. This fuel is being imported into Romania from France by a CERCA-General Dynamics joint venture. The Institute is taking advantage of having the reactor offline for the removal of the spent fuel rods to conduct extensive modernization of the facilities, which date from 1979. This includes the installation of new safety and control systems to replace the original General Dynamics systems. Once restarted, the facility will continue to be used both for research and for the manufacture of nuclear fuel derived from locally mined uranium ore, for use in Romania's principal nuclear power plant in Cernavoda.

¶4. (SBU) The next phase of the GTRI will take place next summer, when a load of Russian-origin HEU will be returned to the Russian Federation from a decommissioned reactor in Magurele, just outside of Bucharest. NNSA has already begun the coordination process for this shipment, with Ken Allen from the Idaho National Laboratory providing a briefing on June 4th to representatives from all Romanian Government agencies which will be involved in this planned fuel transfer. The purpose of the June 4th meeting was to ensure that all parts of the GOR are on board and to ensure that bureaucratic obstacles, such as time delays in obtaining the requisite clearances, not hinder the process. The Prime Minister's office, which chaired the meeting, conveyed a clear message that all agencies should work to complete the administrative processes on time.

15. (SBU) Comment. Post, NNSA, and the National Laboratory are all pleased with the GOR's supportive posture on this program. Dr. Biro and the staff at CNCAN have been particularly helpful in resolving interagency misunderstandings on the part of the Romanian Government. Broadly speaking, the GOR understands the importance of securing radioactive materials and supports U.S. initiatives in this regard. This posture was underlined by the recent agreement on the part of the GOR to sign an MOU with the U.S. on the "Second Line of Defense Initiative;" the GOR is requesting that the signing take place on July 31 (to be reported septel). End Comment.

TAUBMAN